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C O N F I D E N T I A L ALGIERS 001063

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [MARR](#) [PTER](#) [AG](#) [MO](#) [UN](#)
SUBJECT: POLISARIO ASKS U.S. TO RESPOND TO MOROCCAN
PROVOCATIONS

REF: ALGIERS 1041

Classified By: CDA, a.i., William Jordan; reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: DCM and Poloff travelled on November 21 to Tindouf, Algeria, to meet with senior Polisario Front leaders to discuss the future of UN-led mediation efforts on the Western Sahara conflict and to observe the conditions of life in the Sahrawi refugee camps. Polisario officials reiterated criticism (per reftel) of the Moroccan government's toughened stance on the Western Sahara conflict and its treatment of Sahrawi activists and requested the international community to respond. Sahrawi leaders cautioned that Moroccan actions could complicate future negotiations between the parties mediated by UNSYG Personal Envoy Christopher Ross. A cable on meetings with NGOs working with refugees and impressions of current camp conditions will follow septel. End Summary.

Polisario Accuses Morocco of Undermining UN Efforts

12. (C) DCM and Poloff made a daylong visit to Tindouf on November 21 to confer with UN officials and tour nearby Sahrawi refugee camps. With many senior Polisario officials (including SecGen Abdelaziz) away at a conference in Barcelona, we had not expected a serious, substantive program of meetings. That proved far from the case, as DCM and Poloff were taken to the Polisario "presidency" shortly after finishing their UN meetings. The apparent intent was to echo or expand upon what we heard from the Polisario's "ambassador" in Algiers a few days earlier per reftel. Polisario "Prime Minister" Abdelkader Taleb Omar led off by telling the DCM that UN-led negotiations needed to take place in an atmosphere of calm and trust, but King Mohammed VI had escalated the dispute and was undermining efforts to achieve a peaceful solution. Omar continued by saying that the UN Security Council called for progress on human aspects of the conflict, but the King's speech calling for the punishment of traitors, Morocco's arrest of activists who had visited Tindouf, and its deportation of the Sahrawi activist Aminatou Haidar ran counter to that spirit. Omar cited reports by several international human rights organizations pointing to restrictions on personal expression in Moroccan-controlled Western Sahara. Taleb Omar said Polisario has refrained from taking a public position on Morocco's actions but that it is under great pressure from its supporters to do so.

Sahrawi Leaders Reiterate the Need for a "Democratic" Solution

13. (C) Bachir Mustafa, a member of the Polisario's National Secretariat's Political Branch, stated that, since the 1991 ceasefire, the Polisario has put its faith in the UN and has hoped to find a peaceful solution by which neither party feels defeated. He said that a "democratic solution" would strengthen the credibility of the UN, weaken extremism, and help cultivate a democratic culture in North Africa in

accordance, he said, with U.S. goals. Mustafa referred to Morocco as a "big brother" in the region with its own interests, which the Polisario does not wish to harm. He went on to pledge Polisario's cooperation with regional actors in the area of counterterrorism.

Seeking International Pressure on Morocco

14. (C) Omar and Mustafa both called for the U.S. and UN to pressure Morocco to release the seven Sahrawi activists it arrested in October, to encourage a solution to the conflict based on "international legality," and to provide guidelines for future negotiations. Sahrawi "President" Abdelaziz's diplomatic adviser Radi Bachir warned that unless Morocco addresses the cases of the arrested and deported Sahrawi activists, as the Polisario requested from the UN Secretary General this month, the talks will experience major complications. Mustafa called the Moroccan actions a provocation and said that although Morocco claims that the dispute is a threat to its stability, Polisario had an interest in maintaining Moroccan stability. Referring to the Polisario's call for a popular referendum on the territory, Mustafa questioned why Morocco could not reconcile stability with democracy. Omar asserted that Morocco's recent provocative actions were based on a misinterpretation of the U.S. Secretary of State's recent statement about the Moroccan autonomy plan. He claimed that Morocco is closer to destabilizing the region than solving the conflict.

15. (C) DCM replied that the U.S. continues to believe, as NEA A/S Feltman stated publicly during his recent visit to Algiers, that the USG believes that a peaceful, sustainable,

and mutually agreed solution can best be reached through the UN-led process. The Secretary in Marrakech had intended to reaffirm our view that the Moroccan proposal was a serious and credible option for the parties to consider along with other proposals submitted to Ambassador Ross. The DCM reminded the Polisario representatives of the positive basis on which the informal negotiations began and said that the U.S. is awaiting guidance from UN Personal Envoy Christopher Ross on how the international community should continue to show support for his efforts. He urged the Polisario leadership to take the rhetorical high road and avoid provocative statements against Morocco that could be construed as threats to continuing the diplomatic process, noting that further escalation of the war of words would only further undermine the UN envoy's mission. DCM assured the Polisario that U.S. officials are privately voicing similar requests to the Moroccan government to show rhetorical restraint and warning of the grave risk that actions such as those taken against Aminatou Haidar have for the UN-led process.

Comment

16. (C) The treatment of human rights activists is clearly a red line for Polisario. Its leadership repeated that Polisario is close to demanding the release of the activists who visited Tindouf as well as the repatriation of Aminatou Haidar as preconditions for resuming the Ross-led process. Our discussions in Tindouf may have partially assuaged Polisario concerns that the Polisario message was not registering in Washington and helped set the record straight about strong perceptions in Tindouf and Algiers that the Secretary's remarks in Marrakech constituted a strong tilt in favor of Morocco's autonomy plan as the basis of a solution to the Western Sahara dispute. In any case, Polisario told us that, pending a final decision on what to do in the face of recent Moroccan actions and statements, it intends to go ahead with tentative plans to meet Ross informally in NYC in December.

JORDAN